

Accession Number A/3

Classification

Date: 23 April 1974 2:30-4:00 p.m.

Place: Evanston 1944 Jackson

Interview with: Mrs. Louvenia Bell

Interviewed by: S.F. Patton

Observations: Interview in private home, a second floor apartment in an old frame house. Interviewee was somewhat frail after 2 heart attacks; the last one being quite serious. The first response initiated without question

1 A. I was born in Atlanta, Ga. and raised in Atlanta, Ga. I graduated from Spellman Seminary, May 1917. Got married in May 1917. I came to Evanston on my honeymoon. That was June 18, 1917 and I stayed here ever since. After I got here---my husband and I stayed. His two brothers and two sisters begged me to stay. I didn't want to get married but I couldn't get away from the Nigger. My husband's oldest sister got me work

2 Q. Your sister-in-law got you work

A. Yes. Melvin Smith, when he was a little boy, his mother had an employment office. She was the first Colored in Evanston who had an employment office. My sister -in-law, Florence Bell took me to Carrie L. Smith. She gave me a job; my first job in Evanston.

3 Q. Was this the same time

A. The same year

4 Q. What was your husband's name

A. (she went to the back of the apartment to get a paper: Melvin Smith's paper, C.C.C. News, dated Dec. 1971. It was an article about her life) In it was the following:

she worked for Etta Preston, who lived on Clark St. and who later became President of Roycemore School for Girls. Her husband's name: Robert Bell

5 Q. How long did you work for Mrs. Preston

A. Until she died. She had the flu when she and her husband were attending Northwestern that is how she asked for domestic help. I took the job and after she got well I stayed on. We were getting \$2.00 a day



6 Q. Was this for an 8 hour day

A. Yes, just like it is now. We moved up and up in pay.

7 Q. How much money did you earn when you left

A. \$5.00 a day

8 Q. Did Mrs. Preston die at a relatively young age

A. No, she died a couple of years ago. She died just before my husband died, he died in 1964. She, just 2-3 years

9 Q. Were you a very active person

A. My mother and father taught me to be active. Until my heart attack---that was in 1960. 2 years later I had another attack. The doctor told me not to work

10 Q. Did you do housework

A. No. I took care of the family. Mr. Nelson he owned the Northshore Hotel, prior to that the Avenue. He wanted a parlor maid. He employed a woman and her husband who was a chauffeur. They stayed with me, and referred me to the boss. I stayed on five years seven months. I then left. I was doing all these here uniforms; making caps

11 Q. Making caps

A. I made soldiers caps. We would cut the threads. They would take the threads out left from the machine on the caps and coats. Worked until I quit. I left for Floresheim on Belmont Ave. I was running machines. I used to turn out 3000 shoe tips and heels a day. I first made shoe soles.

12 Q. Did they train you to work on machines

A. Yes. I worked on three. I worked on one, then I was put on a second machine and then I worked on the third---the fine issue, the finest! First I made the inner sole; then the heel and toe tips. It could be hazardous, two women lost their fingers.

13 Q. Did you have hospitalization

A. Yes

14 Q. Did many Blacks work there

A. Oh yeah. Over half. There were plenty of them at Floresheim on Belmont and Pulaski



15 Q. When were you at North Shore Hotel

A. I went there in 1919

16 Q. Where the employees mostly Black

A. Mixed. There were more Blacks than Whites. The manager said he could get better service from colours.

(she showed me a Souvenir Program Book: "Annual Coronation Tea" dated May 28, 1972. A page recorded a tribute to her: P. M. Pride of the North Chapter" It stated she was a member of Ebenezer A.M.E. Church since 1917

17 Q. When did you join the church

A. I came in June and joined in November. I went around to all the churchs to see which I liked best

18 Q. What was the attitude of Blacks of Evanston

A. A whole lot different. Nobody cursed. Young people won't recognize you. They'll curse you out in a minute!

19 Q. Do you think younger persons respect the older people today

A. No. Gambling on the corner

20 Q. Do you think there was more solidarity, more closeness among Blacks when you arrived in Evanston

A. Absolutely. We coloured were living on Sherman. Dr. Cotton---Dr. Young, they had offices right across the fountain Square. Dr. Cotton lived on Sherman. Both lived on Sherman. Coloureds were living up and down Sherman from fountain square up to Church St.

21 Q. They were here when you arrived

A. Yes, they were here before I came to Evanston

22 Q. When did the Negroes move west of the tracks

A. 1921, '22, '23. Coloured coming from down South moved everywhere. The Pastor of Ebenezer Church said "I don't know what we are going to do with them." He stated that they are ignorant; he said they were dumb. The pastor took the statement back. He said they were not ignorant. He said "they from the South were buying homes, all we did was sit around." We were renting instead of buying.



23 Q. The earlier residents weren't buying homes

A. We didn't have homes. Only a few did, mostly we were renting.

24 Q. When did the southerners come, shortly after you came

A. Yes, W. War I, and W. War II---that's when they really came.

25 Q. Where did the Blacks buy homes

A. They bought west of the tracks. The coloureds were buying houses. they told coloureds not to move west of those tracks right here. ( N.W.R.R. tracks was where she gestured, right on the next block corner)

26 Q. Did the purchase of homes stop at Green Bay Rd.

A. No. It was from Ebenezer Church to tracks. The tracks here at the corner (Foster and Jackson) or they are at further west the further south you go.

27 Q. When did the people leave Sherman

A. When the city began to build shops, coloured had to leave

28 Q. When did the city begin to build shops

A. Before 1920. After W.W. II, they built the fountain. On the fountain are inscribed the names of those men killed in W.W.II. Viola Snell's boy was the first one killed in W.W.II

29 Q. Snell was coloured

A. Yes. The first boy killed in W.W.II. His mother is still living now

30 Q. His mother is still alive

A. Yes. Horace Graves is alive. He was an undertaker He works at the State Bank. Charlie Fisher is alive. He's retired; he use to work at the Merchandise Mart.

31 Q. Did you have good relations with your Employer

A. Absolutely

32 Q. Did employers make color distinctions among employees

A. All of those I knew never made any distinction. When served breakfast and lunch, we all ate together.



33 Q. When you came were there any Black policemen

A. Yes

34 Q. How many

A. Only know one. That was Lavell (last name). Next one I can remember is Henry White; he became a Sargent.

35 Q. When did Lavell die, in the '50's

A. I guess it was in the '50's

36 Q. What was your reaction to the Depression

A. We had books to go to the store to get what you wanted. In 1929 President Roosevelt told people to save stamp books. I still got them. Before he died he said to keep those stamp books. I have my mother's and my husband's. My mother died in 1947. My husband died in 1964. You got to pay for the stamps now. More in the family, more stamps; more they have to pay.

37 Q. Did you have to stop work during the Depression

A. No.

38 Q. Did most of your friends

A. Most of them didn't

39 Q. Did you see any change in attitude of Blacks toward Whites during the Depression

A. No. Just the same. I couldn't see any difference

40 Q. What work did your husband do

A. He worked for the Chicago N. W. Railroad

41 Q. How long

A. Until retirement

42 Q. Was that at 65

A. He retired in 1959 or 1961

43 Q. How old was he when you married him

A. He was 52



44 Q. Did you have any children

A. No. My husband had a son by his first wife

45 Q. Did you like Evanston when you came

A. No! Not at first

46 Q. What was it you didn't like

A. I heard about Chicago, Evanston and Northwestern U. I was coming to a place I thought looked like heaven. When I saw it, it looked ragged. When we pulled into 95<sup>th</sup> Street, I said, "this is Chicago?" The southside was where all the coloured people lived. There were no curtains; people hanging out windows. I thought Chicago would look like Peachtree Street in Atlanta.

47 Q. Did you notice any difference between the Blacks here and those in Atlanta

A. Everyone wore long dresses

48 Q. Did the Blacks here seem any more antagonistic than those of the South towards Whites

A. No. Some of the people from the South thought they were equal to Whites. I never slung pots and pans, I have never been on my knees and scrub! I never been no cook for White folks. I'll do everything but cook. Those from South claimed they were equal to Whites, yet they were scrubbing floors and working with pots and pans.

49 Q. Some thought they were on an equal basis

A. Yes. Those from the South, they made it hard for those who came after

50 Q. How so

A. They asserted that they had their equal rights. They are still demanding equal rights

51 Q. What do you thing about equal rights

A. That's my opinion. I don't take the time with Jesse Jackson.

52 Q. What do you thing about Jesse Jackson

A. I don't think nothing about him. I'll make no comment.



53 Q. What about Martin Luther King

A. I liked him. He was a good man. We were almost getting the dream. I was in the hospital when he was killed. It was sad news to me.

54 Q. Did any of your relatives come to Evanston

A. Yes. My mother, father, sisters and brothers. My mother, father and brother died in Evanston.

55 Q. How many brothers did you have

A. Two brothers. W.W. II, the oldest brother died

56 Q. How many sisters

A. Two sisters

57 Q. Did your sisters and brothers come with your mother and father the same time

A. No. separately

58 Q. Did your mother and Father live with you when they arrived

A. Yes. Then they bought a home

59 Q. Near here

A. In North Chicago. They were the first Negroes to buy a home in North Chicago

60 Q. How long after you were here did your mother and father arrive

A. 1920 or 1921

61 Q. When did your sister come

A. One came a year after. The other died in Atlanta. One sister was in Evanston and her husband was working for Marks, then he was transferred to Philadelphia. She died in Philadelphia, around the '60's.

62 Q. When did your brother come

A. My baby brother came with my mother and father

63 Q. Are you the oldest

A. Second



64 Q. What is the oldest sister name

A. Anna Mae

65 Q. What was youngest sister's name

A. Nellie

66 Q. Did she come to Evanston

A. No

67 Q. Was Anna the oldest

A. No, my brother, ---Anna, me, Nellie and Theodore

68 Q. What was your older brother's name

A. James

69 Q. Did he come to Evanston

A. No he was killed in W.W.I

70 Q. What kind of work did Theodore do

A. Drive a taxi

71 Q. Was this a White company

A. Yes. Butler Cab Co.

72 Q. Was it there when you were here

A. Yes. Butler. My husband's oldest brother drove for Butler Cab Co. He was the only Black driving a cab for Butler. The office was on Maple near Church---no, Davis and Church.

73 Q. Butler was a Black Co.

A. No. He was White and employed Black

74 Q. Did your brother-in-law work for Butler after you arrived

A. I arrived in 1917. He picked us up at the train station

75 Q. What was the name of the older brother

A. Thomas Bell, we called him Tom



76 Q. What did the oldest sister do

A. Whe was a maid

77 Q. Did she work as a maid until she left Evanston

A. Yes. She took care of a whole house. She worked for rich Jews in Philadelphia

78 Q. When did Better Cab Co. start business

A. Must have been in the '50's when they started. I don't recall exactly.

